

Table 4

Multiple Correlation Coefficients for the Prediction of Third Year Examination Results from First Year Performance

| Course                                  | Multiple Correlation Coefficient* |                              |                                     |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|   | First and Third Year              | Matriculation and Third Year | First Year + Matric. and Third Year |
| Arts:                                   |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .24                               | .21                          | .25                                 |
| Females                                 | .23*                              | .22*                         | .26*                                |
| Agricultural Science:                   |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .20                               | .27                          | .30                                 |
| Females                                 | n.a.                              | n.a.                         | n.a.                                |
| Architecture:                           |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .56*                              | .42                          | .56                                 |
| Females                                 | n.a.                              | n.a.                         | n.a.                                |
| Economics:                              |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .33                               | .17                          | .35                                 |
| Females                                 | n.a.                              | n.a.                         | n.a.                                |
| Engineering:                            |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .13                               | .26                          | .13                                 |
| Females                                 | n.a.                              | n.a.                         | n.a.                                |
| Law:                                    |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | n.a.                              | .30                          | .32                                 |
| Females                                 | .33                               | .56*                         | .55*                                |
| Science:                                |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .01                               | .04                          | .05                                 |
| Females                                 | .21                               | .06                          | .23                                 |
| Diploma of Teaching: (Adelaide C.A.E.)  |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | n.a.                              | n.a.                         | n.a.                                |
| Females                                 | n.a.                              | n.a.                         | n.a.                                |
| Diploma of Teaching: (Salisbury C.A.E.) |                                   |                              |                                     |
| Males                                   | .03                               | .13                          | .14                                 |
| Females                                 | n.a.                              | .10                          | .10                                 |

\*Statistically significant at a level of 10% or better  
n.a. Analysis not conducted because of small numbers

equally well to college student populations. The single modification to such selection strategies which is suggested by this study is that the achievement of male and female students ought to be evaluated separately according to the course of study, rather than applying the same standards to each sex.

## REFERENCES:

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## WASTAGE AMONG SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES: 1974-1975

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There seems little doubt that the heavy demand for the relatively limited number of tertiary places during the Fifties and Sixties restricted the chances of entry for undecided, unfinancial, or uncommitted applicants. Now, in the mid-Seventies, the greater accessibility of post-secondary education resulting from the establishment of a large CAE system, university expansion, and the more recent abolition of fees, has opened the door of higher education to many who would not have considered it an alternative to employment.

On the other hand, with the growing interdependence of higher education and a wide range of vocations, the life choices which students see as open to them are rapidly multiplying. Increasing numbers of students no longer see initial enrolment as committing them to completing their course of study: alternatives, which may become preferable, are known to exist. Thus there is now a significant, and perhaps a growing, number of students who fulfil the requirements and pass the examinations for one or more years of their course but who do not re-enrol to complete their degrees.

The principal aims of the project<sup>1</sup> reported upon here were to identify this group at a large vocationally-oriented university and to discover the motives which prompted the decision not to re-enrol. The Registrar supplied a list of all students not re-enrolling in 1975, from which graduates, and those students excluded or given leave of absence, had been stricken. Open-ended questionnaires<sup>2</sup> were then sent to them. Only 335 students, of the 1216 names given us, responded to the questionnaire, of which 204 fell within the survey's area of interest, the remainder either abandoning their course during term, re-enrolling, graduating, or giving insufficient information to allow one to place them anywhere. The responses of 16.75% of those on the original list placed them within the terms of reference of the survey, 10.75% made invalid responses, and 72.5% did not reply.

Respondents were asked to give in as much detail as they wished their reasons for not re-enrolling and to indicate the one over-riding factor which led to their decision. Content analysis of these replies revealed three major aspects of motivation:

- I. The effect of the course, degree, School or University on them as individuals: n = 115. (57%)
- II. The pressure imposed by employment or distance from the University: n = 44 (21%)
- III. Change in personal and family situation since commencing at University: n = 45. (22%)

Each of these will now be considered in more detail.

**I. Disillusionment With The University Experience**  
These comments come from students who tried the University, investigated its worth for them, and found it wanting. They divide easily in five specific areas:

| Disillusionment due to:                                   | No. of Students |
|---|-----------------|
| — incompatibility of course with student's own life-style | 38              |
| — student's expectations of the course not met            | 33              |
| — student's educational needs not met                     | 15              |
| — physical and emotional environment of the University    | 16              |
| — specific teaching methods and academic conduct          | 13              |
| Total:  | 115             |

**Incompatibility** — These students mentioned a changed personal orientation and a newly-developed questioning attitude towards the value of an academic course and toward the worth of a degree. In addition, some students referred to changes in their values which they felt were incompatible with university study:

My whole outlook on life has changed from a material and status satisfaction attained through a Uni. degree to a much simpler and humbler life living off the land. Up until the time I left Uni. I had not seriously thought what I intended doing with my life but had just followed the traditional societal guidelines . . . I guess I'm just a "dropout" of the academic professional career-type system and very, very glad that I dropped out.

Surveying, Year 2

This dissatisfaction was, according to some respondents, produced by the University community. These students — especially those of mature age and others who felt themselves "different" from what they regarded as the average — were most vocal in presenting their fellow undergraduates as cliquish and reserved, their academic instructors as cold and

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formal, and the entire social system at U.N.S.W. as grey, featureless and off-putting.

Another group spoke of their difficulty in settling down for two or more years to long days of lectures and expressed a preference for action or for a combination of work and study. Those who reacted strongly against the teaching and learning environment described their feelings as: "intense boredom", "apathy", "eventual feeling of alienation and lack of meaning".

**Expectations not met** — Some confessed that lack of knowledge about the career outcome of their degree course had been the reason for an unwise choice of course; others admitted that the reasons for their initial choice of course were so insubstantial that the completion of the enrolment card was almost a capricious act.

Although I had looked into the course before I enrolled I felt Uni. guidance was inadequate in revealing course content and outline. Let's say I chose the wrong course.

Commerce, Year 1

The desirability of a year off between school and university in order to gain more self-knowledge and a greater familiarity with a chosen field was also mentioned.

Needed a break between school and university to mature.

Architecture, Year 1

Needed a year to decide on priorities.

Health Administration, Year 2

**Educational needs not met** — Fifteen respondents gave as their main reason for not returning to University their disappointment with the lack of stimulation in their course. They felt that they had not been encouraged to be creative and that mediocre standards of work were acceptable. In general, university study had failed to inspire and motivate them.

Could not derive personal satisfaction from the course.

Architecture, Year 1

Course not challenging.

Health Administration, Year 2

Too mechanical, not creative.

Commerce, Year 1

It is clear, then, that over half of the dropouts encountered something at U.N.S.W. — for many had transferred, or said they would transfer — to lead them to prefer another environment.

## II. Reasons Associated With Pressure of Work or Distance from the University

As would be expected, part-time and external students compose the majority of those giving considerations associated with their occupation as a major reason for declining to re-enrol. Also, certain full-time students reported that after-hours jobs taken in order to meet living expenses created a workload too great to bear.

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| — job pressure                       | 19 |
| — distance of residence from campus  | 16 |
| — Royal Australian Navy <sup>3</sup> | 9  |
| Total:                               | 44 |

Evidently, the benefits in terms of a completed degree were not regarded as attractive enough to compensate for the long hours and fatigue. Time spent "hassling" with peak-hour traffic, the discomfort of the journey and lethargy at the end of the day preceding an evening class, were also mentioned.

## III. Reasons Associated With Personal Stress and Family Difficulties

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| — expectation of failure            | 10 |
| — finance                           | 9  |
| — personal illness, pregnancy, etc. | 26 |
| Total:                              | 45 |

Among women students, marriage, pregnancy and home responsibilities were mentioned frequently as reasons for discontinuing. Several men also mentioned strains created by home and family duties while their wives completed degree study alongside them. Difficulties were experienced by married students in keeping up with course work, undertaking sufficient reading, attaining a satisfying standard in each subject, and in finding enough time to experience university study as a pursuit where ideas could be shared with other students.

Another group, although successful in meeting the requirements of the examiners, felt that their chances of success in succeeding years were very small and gave the expectation of "inevitable" failure as the prime reason for not returning. The stress arising from loneliness, homesickness and bewilderment in a large university campus convinced several students that they could not return and "survive".

## Conclusions

In the extensive commentary which these students provided on their decisions to abandon their courses at U.N.S.W., there is ample evidence to support assertions on the subjective and individually-based nature of "wastage". From the fact that over half of all valid responses come from students who actively rejected their courses, while only a minority felt that "circumstances" were too much for them, one might infer a pressing need to give matriculants more advance information on the environment they are about to enter. Advice and guidance may dissuade those with poor motivation, ill-formed or inappropriate career plans, and/or little commitment to academic study from coming to a situation they might not enjoy. A better understanding of what they will find would allow these individuals to proceed directly to institutions or occupations likely to prove more rewarding and congenial.

This is also a valid inference from data gathered in other universities. A Macquarie University study<sup>4</sup> likewise found the greatest wastage at the end of first year. In their sample — approximately 240 of their cases would have fallen within our terms of reference — "lack of interest, emotional problems, study-related factors, pressure from employment" and a general desire for a break were significant factors. Although this research, like that reported here from the University of New South Wales, found such considerations as nature and faculty of enrolment and distance of residence from campus to be significant, motivation was found to be of primary importance for full-time students.

Again, at Adelaide University, research<sup>5</sup> on the dropout population demonstrated that, among 28 newly-enrolled undergraduates in their sample of 137, 50% listed difficulties with study or university life as their main reason for withdrawing. By contrast, only 11.8% of previously-enrolled students gave this as their principle reason: their particular problems were associated with employment, and with what are described as "Life Circumstances".

It should, however, be noted that none of the students whose responses are analysed here is comparable to Rump and Greet's new undergraduates, who are specifically described as withdrawing "during the first half of their first year"<sup>6</sup>; all U.N.S.W. responses were from students who had completed at least one year. Further, the correlation of year of enrolment with reason for withdrawal (see Table 1) indicates a fair amount of similarity among all years, most especially with regard to motivation to remain at one's studies.

It can also be argued that many of the most alienated first year students left before the year's end, but these were not included in our survey.

It remains noteworthy that, as compared with the Adelaide population, this survey revealed greater dissatisfaction with the campus, and less concern over other matters, regardless of year of enrolment. Although we can agree with Rump and Greet that withdrawal for reasons of dissatisfaction with the university environment is most common in first year, and that most dropouts do so somewhere before the start of their second year, we have not found the same decided shift in emphasis among motives for this decision.

This represents an apparently clear reversal of a previously published finding. It is not easy to explain why this is so. The instruments used were not identical and the responses were coded according to different principles, so that the responses grouped under similar labels might not be comparable in fact. It is an intriguing possibility, however, that there are real variations between patterns of student motivation at different tertiary institutions.

Although the majority of the respondents listed dissatisfaction with various aspects of life and work at the University as their principle reason for discontinuing their studies, there may be some comfort for the academic staff in the fact that only five students specified poor teaching methods as the main focus of discontent. Again, ten students mentioned fear of eventual failure as the cause of their withdrawal. Thus, the standards of academic excellence in learning and teaching are not the primary determinant of "wastage" for these students. Where Rump and Greet<sup>7</sup> recommend that "... students with much poorer than average academic ability should consider carefully, before they enrol, whether their circumstances and motivations will allow sufficient studying time to overcome this handicap" we feel they in part miss the mark. Although marginal academic ability is surely no advantage, motivation is of greater importance and all prospective students would be well advised to think carefully about their reasons for wanting to attend university and the amount of time which they wish to devote to study.

What then can be said about this rejection, temporary or permanent, of higher education? The more data one compiles on each student, and most especially the greater scope one gives each student to explain the steps leading to his decision, the greater is the diversity and the significance of each choice situation. In Baumgart's words, "a high proportion of the reasons given for withdrawal from the university tended to be ideosyncratic. Nevertheless... our data revealed that, provided we considered relatively homogeneous groups of students, some systematic patterns could be identified."<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that it was one of the original aims of this project to identify "patterns", our conclusion must be that an analysis of the ideosyncratic nature of student decision-making is likely to prove more

Table 1

| Year of last enrolment | Withdrew for reasons associated with: |            |                       |      |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------|
|                        | the university                        | employment | personal difficulties |      |
| I                      | 63%                                   | 16%        | 21%                   | 100% |
| II                     | 56%                                   | 31%        | 13%                   | 100% |
| III                    | 60%                                   | 13%        | 27%                   | 100% |
| IV                     | 58%                                   | 28%        | 14%                   | 100% |



fruitful in increasing our understanding of "the dropout". The responses which we collected indicate that each withdrawing individual had developed — sometimes in rich detail — his own perception of university life and its relation to his own life and values, had consulted his own judgement as to what was "best" to do, and had acted accordingly.

Although very little is known about the detailed steps which lead a student to decide to drop out — or to continue — and there is a need for more in-depth studies of the motivations of individual students, there are sufficiently numerous leads to give support to the claim that wastage is largely a matter of individual reactions to the university environment. It is clear from our survey, and from other studies, that much more needs to be done to provide intending students with accurate information about the demands and characteristics of university life — many first-year students only realise that they have made an unwise decision when it is too late for them to do anything about it except to dropout. It is also clear that, for a large number of adequately-motivated students, the first year at university is a depressing and unrewarding experience. It is the responsibility of the universities to see that the legitimate aspirations and expectations of these students are not frustrated.

#### REFERENCES

1. For further details see Lewandowski, K., Powell, J. P., and White, Ruth, *Academically Successful Students who did not Re-Enrol at the University of New South Wales*, 1975. Sydney: Tertiary Education Research Centre, U.N.S.W., 1976.
2. See Appendix 1 for details of the questionnaire.
3. Navy personnel formed a discrete subgroup, as all explained that the decision to withdraw had been taken by their sponsor and funding agent, the R.A.N.; these students would have remained at the University if they could.
4. Baumgart, N., "A Study of Discontinuing Students at Macquarie University". *Australian Educational Researcher*, 2, No. 2, 17-20, 1975.
5. Rump E. E. and Greet N. S. "The Characteristics and Motivations of Students who withdraw without Failing" *Vestes*, 18, 150-160, 1975.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
8. Baumgart, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

#### Appendix I Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a survey being conducted by the Tertiary Education Research Centre to elicit the opinions of students who did not re-enrol for university study in 1975.

There are only three questions. Please give your answers as fully as possible. We are interested in as many comments as you want to include. There may be some points which you feel may not be of importance to us but if you think that they are relevant we would like to hear about them.

The information will be used to assess trends only and individual opinions will be treated confidentially.

1. Thinking back to your time at this University and the period prior to commencement of courses this year, try to remember some of the things that led to your decision not to return to the University — then tell us, in as much detail as you can, why you did not re-enrol.  
(Would you underline the one over-riding factor you consider influenced your decision not to re-enrol.)
2. What advice would you give someone with similar interests and background as yourself who is thinking about going to university?
3. What would you say to someone who was undecided about re-enrolling next year?

## STUDENT DEFERMENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES 1971-1976

Margot Pearson\*

In recent years, universities in Australia have instituted schemes for student deferment. The idea is to allow a student who has been granted admission, to take a year off before enrolling in a course of study. This break between school and university is seen as an opportunity for a student who has any doubts about his goals, or family or financial problems, to sort things out and so return to his studies with greater maturity and motivation. Deferment is not given to students who wish to enrol at a different tertiary level institution or to transfer from another tertiary institution.

During the period 1971-1976, 1427 deferments have been granted to prospective students by the University of New South Wales. A summary of the reasons for deferment approved by the University for the past two years is given in Table 1.

It is interesting that in 1976 there are fewer students who state that they are uncertain of their aims. Most have some reasonably specific reason for deferring, including those seeking a break from study in order to travel or gain work experience. A few students wish to return to school to improve their results so that they can gain admission to courses with restricted entry (for example Medicine). If their efforts fail, these students still have a place open to them at the University.

Students are seeking and being granted deferment for all the reasons cited, and possibly others, in increasing numbers. In 1971, 50 students were granted deferments. By 1976, 659 deferments were granted yet the number of students involved is still small. In 1975 deferring students would have increased the first year enrolment only by 8%. Nor do

Table 1  
Reasons for Approved Deferments

| Year | Financial & Personal | Travel/Work Experience | Returning to School to improve results | Uncertain of Aims | Other | Total |
|------|----------------------|------------------------|--|-------------------|-------|-------|
| 1975 | 107                  | 141                    | 9                                      | 68                | 13    | 338   |
| 1976 | 222                  | 296                    | 35                                     | 20                | 86    | 659   |

the majority of the students who defer subsequently enrol at the University of New South Wales the following year. Of the 253 students who deferred in 1974, only 64 (25%) enrolled in 1975. Of the 338 students who deferred in 1975, 67 (20%) enrolled in 1976 in the course for which deferment was granted, while a further 28 enrolled in other courses at the University of New South Wales.

It might be thought that there would be a significant variation among faculties of students who enrol after deferment but this does not appear to be the case, as is shown in Table II.

The figures for those deferring in 1975 and enrolling in 1976 are similar. As might be expected, given the restricted number of positions available, most deferring students actually subsequently enrol only in Medicine.

An attempt was made to compare the performance of the students who deferred in 1974 and enrolled in

1975 with the performance of other first year students in the courses in which the 63<sup>1</sup> deferring students enrolled in 1975. The distribution of

Table II  
Distribution of students who deferred in 1974 and enrolled in 1975, by Faculty

|                 | Deferred 1974 | Enrolled 1975 |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Applied Science | 24            | 2             |
| Architecture    | 11            | 3             |
| Arts            | 93            | 22            |
| Commerce        | 41            | 12            |
| Engineering     | 22            | 5             |
| Law             | 15            | 5             |
| Medicine        | 8             | 7             |
| Prof. Studies   | 20            | 5             |
| Sciences        | 19            | 3             |
| Total           | 253           | 64            |

\*Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of New South Wales.